

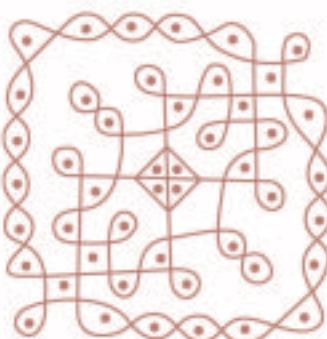
INDIAN

# Folklife



A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

Serial No.20 July 2005



## Teaching and transmission of Indian Performing Arts

Guest Editor  
**Hanne M. de Bruin**



## NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC) is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, registered in Chennai dedicated to the promotion of Indian folklore research, education, training, networking and publications. The aim of the centre is to integrate scholarship with activism, aesthetic appreciation with community development, comparative folklore studies with cultural diversities and identities, dissemination of information with multi-disciplinary dialogues, folklore fieldwork with developmental issues and folklore advocacy with public programming events. Folklore is a tradition based on any expressive behaviour that brings a group together, creates a convention and commits it to cultural memory. NFSC aims to achieve its goals through cooperative and experimental activities at various levels. NFSC is supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

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#### Cover Illustration:

Cover illustration and design motifs in this issue are from the genre 'kolam' (Tamil women household drawings).

NFSC has moved into its own premises! Please note our new address.

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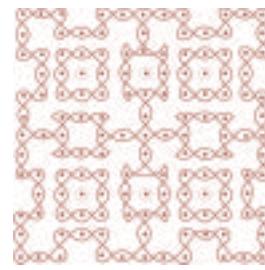
up in the beautiful city of Hastinapur, having watched the entire epic unfold under her eyes, being a victim of the circumstances, but remaining a passive agent to all, fascinated me. In all the versions I read during my preparation, I could find her mentioned just four times and in all cases only her name. I decided to watch all the other women through the eyes of this silent spectator. Girl child neglect weaved itself into the text with ease. Next came working out the performance itself.

In all my scripts I have given particular attention to clothing and props. While *Nirvanam* is consciously performed with the clothes I am in on that day and keeping all else to a stark, bare minimum, and keeping in mind to erase my sexuality, *Kannadi* works on real excess. For *Vellavi*, the script about the old Dhobi woman, it was colours spread across the performance area. For *Dushala* I had the choice of recreating the regal costumes normally used for *Mahabharata* performances or come up with something more contemporary. Though I had the floor plan of the performance area, I decided to wait until the day of the show itself to work out my style. Two saffron screens already available with the organizers were decisive. I used black as my beginning and end colours adding a green scarf. The sackcloth skirt, which the Festival's costumer Margot van Dam designed, became my own stage costume to which I added a mud pot and a long cycle chain. I tried not to impersonate the character, but keep both the teller and told separate from each other. That way it avoids the traditional identification with the character and allows her to unfold in the performance:

*If gender everywhere is a social construct, then do I choose my gender to be performed for the day like I choose my costume for the day from my wardrobe? If its other—the masculine—[only] defines the idea of feminine how do I understand 'feminism'—as a transgressive way of life? If culture is not limited to geographical or linguistic distinctions, how do I come to terms with my own past, and thereby function in the present and future? Is my past my own or does the community I emerge from have a claim to it also? Is it then limited by how other communities view this past? Is every deed of mine defined by some dark secret from my past? If all identity is already assigned as something unchangeable, then when do I begin to question the 'I' itself and the way my body is circumscribed by this culturally constructed identity? What if, if I let my body break the shackles of these knots; no matter how badly it is hurt in the process and to recognize that I am not alone?*

Definitions of how I see gender, sexuality, culture and identity have shifted greatly in this last decade. I have come to understand that all these are fluid and that each one of us operates under *split conditions*. Ideally it is this split condition that I would like to explore in future. I began to expand the idea of the split condition to all avenues from where we gather our conditionings. My own studies, my history, my chauvinism of holding my first thirty years with a pride of being Tamil, then

understanding that my upper caste identity splinters it no matter how much I de-brahminise myself, my first academic step into learning about gender then spreading into more organic expressions of the same in everyday life, my comfort zone of *story-telling* as opposed to more traditional *acting*, and my activism is what I would like to marry into my forthcoming performances. Thus, they can become not a mere personal journey, but a human journey that can be taken up to study any situation by anybody in the future. \*



## ANADINATH: THE UNKNOWN PERCUSSION MAESTRO

~~~~~ Pulak Dutta ~~~~~

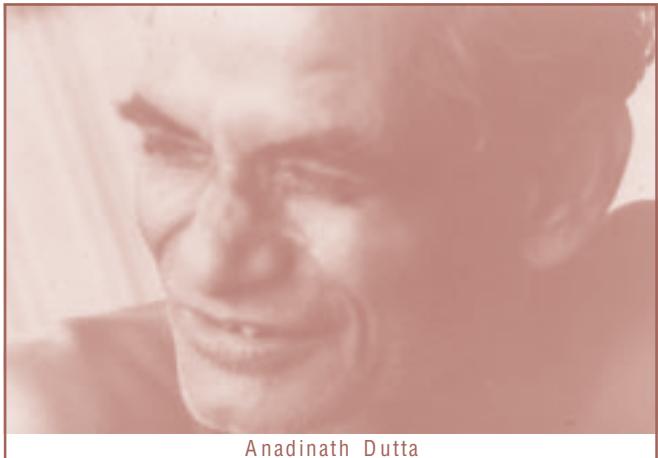
*Pulak Dutta* is a practicing artist, musician and music director. He teaches at the Department of Graphic Art, Kala Bhavana, Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan.

**O**n December 18, 2002, Supriyo Tagore described Anadinath Dutta as a 'distinguished ashramite' in the weekly prayer at the Upasana Griha in Santiniketan. 'I consider him a distinguished ashramite because he was one of the very few talented people who quietly served the ashram without expecting anything in return.'

Anadinath was born in 1923 at Bishnupur into a family of traditional craftsman. Bishnupur is well known for its rich cultural heritage. It is also the only Hindustani Classical Music Gharana of Bengal. Situated in the district of Bankura of West Bengal it was the capital of Mallabhum, a Vaishnava kingdom. The whole of Eastern India was flooded with the spirit of creativity in every sphere of cultural activity during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A new worldview, a new consciousness—the wave of Vaishnavism was felt everywhere from the king's palace to the hut of the poor. Vaishnavism was not only a religion; it was a religious, social and cultural movement at the same time—an 'aesthetic religion'. The borderline between high and low art, classical and popular art, between terracotta temple, Baluchari silk, conch shell craft as well as between Kirtan and Dhrupad was either very thin or did not exist at all. It is still quite vibrant with its festivals, music, traditional craft and a simple way of life. Anadinath spent the first twenty-six years of his life here. His personality and his music developed in this cultural ambience. Amelia Maciszewski, a former music student of Santiniketan and an ethnomusicologist from Austin, video-interviewed him in 1996:

*'I used to play a small Dhulki when I was about three years old. My father, Ramgati Dutta, used to sing as he worked on his craft and I used to play with him. When I was a bit older, around four, he bought me a bigger Dhol. I have heard from him that Ramprasanna Bandyopadhyay used to pass by our house. He would stand behind the wall and listen to me playing for at least five minutes on his way. He told my father, "I will teach him if I am alive when he is old enough". Of course I did not get the opportunity—he died before I was ready. My father used to play Khol and I started playing that Khol. Since it was too big for me he bought me a smaller one. During the Puja I heard Dhol players drumming and dancing in Malleshwar. As I came back home I put the Khol on my shoulder and started jumping around as I played on the Khol, copying the drummers I saw. The handle broke and the fired mud Khol fell on the ground, broken into pieces. It was repaired with tin and I used to play on that. When I was about five years old, Subodh Nandi and I used to play Dhol and dance around with a group of children from five to eight years old who sang Nam Kirtan. The group was very popular. Then a little later my elder brother, Jagannath Dutta started learning Khol from a guru. He used to practice on the terrace and I used to listen to him. When he finished and left the Khol there, I would go and start playing. Observing that, my father bought me another big Khol and started training me personally—he would wake me up at three o'clock in the morning. In cold winter morning the training—right from hatuti sadhan—would continue at least till six o'clock. When a Kirtan singer called Bhushan Babaji went out for begging in the afternoon he would sit with me and teach me. He sang and asked me to play with him. I used to play all the talas of Kirtan with him. I started playing Tabla along with Dhol and Khol with Krishna Jatra. It was called Balak Sangit as it was a Jatra group of children.'*

*...Then an offer came to me from Bishnupur Music College to join the college as a Tabla teacher. I was reluctant and said, "I don't know anything, how can I work there?" Pashupatibabu, the Tabla teacher of the college used to come from another place and could not be regular since his wife was seriously ill. Surendranath Bandyopadhyay [Principal of the college] asked me to come twice a week and I agreed to join the college as Tabla teacher [in 1946]. My attention shifted from Khol to Tabla. I had played Khol with all the great Kirtan singers of those days, played in Ramayan Gan, Jatra etc. I had participated in all the major Kirtan festivals and played solo Khol. In the college Surenbabu asked me to attend Pashupatibabu's Tabla class and learn from him. But when I sat in his class he stopped teaching his students because I was quick to pick things up and he did not want me to learn. I told Surenbabu about it and decided not to attend the class any more. I was teaching Tabla and was accompanying with Sitar, Esraj and Song—I was teaching and learning at the same time. Surenbabu used to sit with me after the classes were over. He played Banjo and I accompanied him on the Tabla. He would explain things to me—sam, phank, tal etc. He taught me the fingering of playing theka in high speed with ease. I used to play Pakhawaj with Gopeshwar*



Anadinath Dutta

*Bandhyopadhyay's Dhrupad. Since I played Khol it was easy for me to pick it up. Gopeshwarbabu showed me a few things about Pakhawaj.'*

With this background Anadinath joined Santiniketan as an "Instructor Accompanist in the Music and Dancing Section of the Vinaya-Bhavana, in the Visva-Bharati" in 1949. As Visva Bharati turned into a central university in 1951 his services were transferred to "Sangit-Bhavana with effect from July 1, 1951". Rabindranath Tagore, then Vice Chancellor of Visva Bharati, concluded his appointment letter with the following words. "...may I offer you my sincere thanks for your meritorious and loyal services to the Visva Bharati in the past and also express the hope that I shall enjoy the same from you in the future in our common endeavour to make the Visva Bharati an ideal centre of learning and culture, as contemplated by our Pratishthatacharya?"

There were three major musical fields in Santiniketan where he operated. First of all there was a whole world of Rabindranath's song, dance-drama and festival; secondly, the Indian Classical Music and the third, folk and popular music. He was the only person around to be able to perform in all three categories effortlessly and musically. He was neither playing Khol on Pakhawaj, nor playing Tabla on Khol. When visiting Kirtan or Tappa singers came to teach at the institution he was the only person who knew and could play those difficult and rare talas with them. It was Anadinath who was asked to accompany the classical musicians who performed in Santiniketan—with Dhrupad, Khayal, Thumri as well as with instrumental music. Rabindranath incorporated elements from classical, folk and popular traditions in his songs. "He [Anadinath] was therefore," Biswajit Roy writes in 'A Khol Maestro', (Amrita Bazar Patrika, November 01, 1986), "an ideal percussionist for Gurudev Rabindranath's songs, both of the classical genre and folk types, as also for his dance dramas and operas. ...all the official programmes of Visva Bharati had to rely on the virtuosity of Anadinath. Whether it was the movement of the cards in Tasher Desh, or the Manipuri or Kathakali steps in Chitrangada, he could effortlessly give them an artistic form on his instruments. ...While giving solo recitals in Khol, he could make his instrument speak and render verses through it."

Rabindranath's musical training was insignificant by any standard of musical training, yet he was one of the greatest

composers of all time. He also had peculiar and vague ideas about *tal*. His discussion on *tal*, *lay* and *chhanda*, especially in his essay 'Sangiter Mukti' expresses the confusion quite clearly. In some of his songs, although the melodic structure is fundamentally cyclical, it does not complete the cycle a few times within the song. Thus, some new *tals* were born like *Ardha Jhap* (2+3=5 beats) or *Jhampak* (3+2=5 beats). They are known as 'Rabindra *srishta tal*'. To the best of our knowledge we know that he himself never called them *tal* nor did he compose the *thekas* for them. Anybody playing with a Rabindra Sangit singer had to go through the painful experience of constantly negotiating with time and metre. What was Anadinath's device to negotiate this? I have noticed that most of the time he would not play the *theka* but follow the rhythm of words and moods. As we know, this is a common practice in Dhrupad but with time and metre being perfect. There are other songs based on new *tals* where the time structure reached completeness and achieved a character of *tal* like *Nabatal*. The published version of the division of the time structure is 3+2+2+2 and the *theka* is *dha den tal tete kata l gadi ghene l dhage tete*. *Dhage tete* creates an expectation of something else to follow to return to the first beat or the *sam*; as the last phrase it gives a feeling of incompleteness. Anadinath's *theka* was far more complete and musical: *dha den tal tete dha l tete kata gadi ghene* with the structure being 3+2+4.

Anadinath never treated *sanchari* and *abhog* as separate units of the song, just as in Dhrupad, and therefore never played a *tehai* at the end of *sanchari* which finishes at the beginning of *abhog*. This happened not only because he was taught to treat them as a single unit but because of his deeper understanding of the musical logic behind it. Talking about *tehai* brings us to the most fascinating part of his music. He was a master of *tehais*. He hardly played short *tehais*, most often they were long. With his remarkable ability to 'see' the song, he would start the *tehai* from a beat no one could ever think of and finish it on the first beat of the song, not necessarily the *sam*, with amazing mastery. Another distinguishing feature of his music was his application of polyrhythmic pattern—3 over 4 or 4 over 3. He would not do it with every song or sustain it for a long time. But with his measured and most musical application, the song as well as the singer/s used to come alive. There was always an element of unexpectedness in his music although his music was unmistakably always his own.

The most distinguishing qualities of his music were a result of his ability to remain open minded and constantly grow and experiment as a musician. Otherwise how can a traditionally trained musician remain so creative in facing new forms of music such as Rabindra Sangit or Tagore's dance-drama? Or playing Khol, Dhol, Tabla and Pakhawaj with traditional dance forms like Kathakali and Manipuri? It is certainly not just learning to play the instruments but more importantly the musical atmosphere he was brought up in, that of Bishnupur, which made this possible. It is the ability to live meaningfully which is central in any process of transmission.

Basically, the act of giving was what kept his life enjoyable and worth living. Although it came naturally, it was the only way to live happily within the power structure he operated in. A few examples should make my point clear. The final performance of Tagore's dance-drama was not the only thing the Santiniketan community looked forward to. Everybody was allowed to be a part of the month-long rehearsals as spectators. It was interesting to notice the concentration and distribution of power within the performing community in these sessions. Hierarchically ordered as, 1. The director 2. The singers 3. The choreographers 4. The accompanists (Esraj-Tanpura) and then, at the end, 5. The percussion players. In one of those rehearsal sessions the director looked hard on the singer for not singing the song in the right tempo, the singer looked back to the Esraj player, who gave her the lead, and to prove his location within the power structure, the Esraj player looked at Anadinath irritably, saying, "Can't you play properly?" For a simple change in the tempo of a song within the whole dance-drama, another drama had to be performed! Anadinath, who had nothing to do with the tempo, was only following the tempo that was already there, took it with a smiling face.

A cassette of Rabindra Sangit by Shantidev Ghosh was published in Kolkata in 1990 ('Ami Tarei Khuje Berai', Sound Wing, SWC 2080). All the songs, except two, were taken from a live performance held in Santiniketan and accompanied by Anadinath Dutta. Some time later, a letter was published in the Letter to the Editor section of two Bangla newspapers regarding the cassette. It states, "Sound Wing has published this recording (presumably with Sri Ghosh's consent) and has started marketing it without asking for permission from the instrumentalists. They didn't even think it important to mention this particular programme or the names of the other artists." To which Shantidev reacted with a nasty letter written to Anadinath on January 6, 1991 accusing him and his son to be behind this 'false' allegation. Anadinath's response was exceptional. He wrote him back on January 18, 1991, "I have heard the cassette and have no doubt about the fact that I played the Khol and Tabla with those songs but I don't need to prove them. There may be people urgently in need to prove that they were not mine." Years later in 2002, after Shantidev died, Visva Bharati and Saregama India Ltd. published a CD of Shantidev's songs (CD NF 142473). This time Anadinath's permission was sought and the names of the instrumentalists were mentioned in the CD. But a casual hearing of the CD by a person with minimum sense of music tells us that not all the songs were accompanied by Anadinath and that there were at least three different Mandira players involved—yet we see one name for Khol-Tabla and one for Mandira!

In relation to the on-going debate on Intellectual Property Act, it is important to look at the ground level reality. As Biswajit Roy quite rightly points out in the above mentioned article, "...it will not be within the foreseeable future that a percussionist is to receive his due from his listeners and society in general. ...One recalls all that because a percussion expert of the level of Anadinath Dutta still now remains in comparative obscurity despite

making a distinguished and many-sided contribution to the classical and folk music of Bengal as well as to Rabindra Sangeet, for well over four decades." The same concern echoes in Supriyo Tagore's speech at the weekly prayer, "Perhaps we have failed to give him his due. ...he has left the ashram as quietly as he served it."

On November 25, 2002, I was giving a shave to my father, Anadinath Dutta, at around ten in the morning. He was recovering from a critical illness—could not recognise people, could not speak, could not eat for about a week. I was talking to him as I was shaving; every now and then he would touch his face with his hands to feel if the shave was proper. He was also talking to me but could not produce sound. His passionate eyes full of love and affection figuring out where he was, his voice desperately trying to communicate, whispered, "I can understand everything but I can't produce sound".

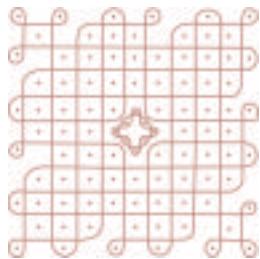
...At around ten at night the same day, I saw the same pair of eyes, come alive in a flash—not figuring out where he was but deep in his ability to be one with others. Moments later I watched his soundless, visual death—blood flowed out of his mouth where his music flowed. Isn't it this deep urge to be one with others, or the realisation of relational existence, which make creativity possible? Then, the question remains: how does this get transmitted? ♦

project of the Bern College of Arts and Natanakairali in Irinjalakuda, which focuses on music education in India.

**A**ll children hitherto deprived from opportunities to make music as part of their "normal" education are bound to benefit from being exposed to music from an early age.<sup>1</sup> Participation of children and young people, in and outside India, in Indian music has a positive effect on their intellectual development and well-being, in addition to providing scope for celebration, sharing and light-hearted abandonment. To attain this little is needed in terms of money and/or (costly) instruments. In fact, the absence of big money and costly instruments may be a boon in disguise to enhance the students' participation in music. The scarce funds available should be invested in training and rewarding good teachers and artists who can make a difference in the day-to-day realities of regular schools, rather than in the acquisition of instruments. Musical instruments may be expensive to acquire and maintenance intensive. They can stand in the way of having a good time of making music together, because they are too difficult to handle to be useful in general education. Unless a musical ensemble is the aim of a class, their absence can have a liberating effect. It is more fruitful to sensitize pupils to auditory perception, good posture and proper breathing and the diverse manners by which collective music making can increase their concentration and self-confidence.

At the same time, *more* music is called for in order to enhance the very quality of daily (school) life. Children should be encouraged to make music themselves rather than enjoy it in a passive mode. The importance of music as a school subject is not so much the study of music for its own sake, but its effects on the whole mental and spiritual world of children, above all on their morals.<sup>2</sup> All this can happen naturally when administrators are convinced of the significance of music for the development of the child and willing to undertake efforts to make joint music experiences part of the school routine.

The importance of music in general education was perceived already by Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952), herself an ardent admirer of Indian culture. Until the revolutionary concepts of Montessori education percolate down sufficiently in order to enable average school children to make good use of their innate talents, their teachers should be encouraged to explore avenues that are both affordable and pleasing so as to stimulate their pupils to develop themselves artistically and intellectually. In actual practice this means doing *more with less* in order to ensure that music classes will also reach school children at the grassroots level. While doing so Indian educators can draw inspiration as well as expertise from a range of initiatives started with great success in other fields such as ecology, adult literacy programmes and information technology (Seashore 938 (1967)). Even the most basic music experience a child enjoys at school helps her to cope with situations encountered at home, in public spaces, such as places



## Less is More and More is More: WHY INDIAN MUSIC SHOULD FIND ITS WAY INTO GENERAL EDUCATION

~~~~~ Ludwig Pesch ~~~~~

*Ludwig Pesch* (1955) is a musician, musicologist and teacher specialized in Carnatic music. He studied music at Freiburg University Hochschule für Musik and at Kalakshetra College of Fine Arts in Chennai. He is the author of *The Illustrated Companion to South Indian Classical Music* (Oxford University Press, 1999) and received the 6th Rabindranath Tagore Cultural Award of the Indo-German the Cross of the Order of Merit by the President of the Federal Republic of Germany for his work. At present he is involved in a research